

# Eastern Cambridge Rezoning Petition

Submitted to City Council by the Planning Board  
June 2001

# **Eastern Cambridge Rezoning Petition**

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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
**PLANNING BOARD**  
CITY HALL ANNEX, 57 INMAN STREET, CAMBRIDGE 02139

June 13, 2001

To the Honorable, the City Council,

**Subject: Eastern Cambridge Rezoning Petition**

The Planning Board is pleased to submit for consideration the Eastern Cambridge Rezoning Petition, the product of a year-long study of planning issues in the eastern part of the city. The petition's recommendations embrace the concepts proposed in the Citywide Rezoning Petition – encouraging more housing in a mixed-use environment and reducing commercial density and traffic growth – while tailoring the zoning recommendations to the specific character and needs of the East Cambridge, Wellington-Harrington and Area 4 neighborhoods affected by this petition.

The Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS), upon which these recommendations are based, was a comprehensive planning analysis of the area defined in the Larkin Petition. The study was conducted by a professional consultant team working with a 19-member committee of neighborhood residents; representatives of Eastern Cambridge businesses, property owners, and institutions; and City staff. The recommendations contained in the petition address housing creation, commercial density, traffic and parking, retail development, height limits, open space, and the pedestrian environment.

Specific areas were identified for detailed study, including North Point, the Volpe Center area, the transition areas along Binney Street, and other smaller areas throughout the neighborhoods. Therefore, the Eastern Cambridge Rezoning Petition includes zoning recommendations that address specific locations, as well as Design Guidelines that are intended to apply throughout the study area. The petition includes the following components, which are described in the attached summary sheets and zoning text:

- I. North Point Base Zone and PUD (NP and PUD-6);
- II. PUD at Kendall Square (the Volpe Center area);
- III. Eastern Cambridge Housing Overlay District (Binney Street transition area);
- IV. PUD 4, 4A, and 4B Districts (vicinity of First and Second Streets);
- V. Eastern Cambridge Development Rights Transfer Districts;
- VI. Additional Zoning Changes; and
- VII. Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines.

In forwarding this petition to you, the Planning Board has carefully considered the vision, goals, and recommendations of the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study and the extensive professional analysis and public input went into the development of the zoning recommendations.

The goals of the zoning recommendations are to:

- encourage housing as a predominant use in new development;
- create mixed-use districts close to transit;
- reduce auto trips from new development;
- effect a significant increase in public open space;
- create better transitions in scale and character from neighborhoods to commercial areas; and
- create an urban environment that encourages walking and cycling and provides better connections among neighborhoods, commercial areas, transit facilities, and open space, including the Charles River.

The Planning Board has heard preliminary public comment on these recommendations and is anticipating more comment during the public hearing process. Among the comments received by the Board was the request for flexibility to allow increased commercial density in North Point in exchange for public amenities such as relocation of the Lechmere T station and moderate-income and affordable housing. Given the magnitude of the North Point site and the opportunity to guide the creation of a new neighborhood there, the Board anticipates further analysis of the implications of such additional commercial density as the petition moves through the public review process. In addition, the Planning Board has heard from property owners and residents in the area, and looks forward to continuing to review the proposals with those comments in mind.

The Planning Board believes that this petition meets the objectives of the Citywide Rezoning Petition, while responding to the specific constraints and opportunities presented by the Eastern Cambridge context.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Larissa Brown, Chair

Eastern Cambridge Rezoning Petition

# Summary of Recommendations

## **PART I - NORTH POINT BASE ZONE AND PUD (NP AND PUD-6)**

### **Purpose**

The intent of the proposed North Point zoning is to promote the development of a new, primarily residential neighborhood compatible with the existing East Cambridge neighborhood. The proposed zoning is also based on recognition of constrained motor vehicle access to the area. Proposed changes to both the North Point base and Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning address the desired mix of residential and commercial uses, the density and scale of development, and the amount and location of future open space, among other issues.

### **Proposal**

Proposed base zoning at North Point allows only low-density residential development at an FAR of 1.0, with a nominal amount (10 percent) of office and retail allowed; heights would be capped at 40 feet.

Proposed PUD zoning for the North Point area:

- Requires at least 65 percent of future development to be residential and establishes a maximum of 35 percent commercial development.
- Lowers the commercial FAR permitted in the area in recognition of constrained motor vehicle access to the area and addresses cumulative impacts of traffic from new development. Establishes an FAR of 3.0 within 500 feet of the Lechmere transit station. Establishes an FAR of 2.4 for mixed-use projects located farther than 500 feet from the transit station, but allows FAR to increase up to 3.0 as the percent of residential use increases.
- Reduces the parking allowed on the site by 20 percent from that proposed in the Citywide Rezoning Petition, in order to reduce the number of people driving to the area and limit future traffic growth. Requires developers to commit to a program for reductions in auto vehicle trips by providing increased access to other modes.
- Establishes height gradations with lower height limits (85 feet) close to the existing residential neighborhoods and taller heights (150 feet) allowed farther away. Permits three towers up to 220 feet in height, located along the Gilmore Bridge and the railway tracks.
- Within 50 feet of a public park, requires that parts of a building taller than 65 feet be set back an additional 20 feet from the façade.

- Encourages retail uses to support the new neighborhood that will complement, rather than compete with, existing retail on Cambridge Street. Exempts up to 50,000 square feet of ground floor retail development at the intersection of First Street and O'Brien Highway from the commercial FAR cap.
- Limits total new retail development in the district to 75,000 square feet and restricts the size of retail floor areas to 10,000 square feet to avoid "big box" retail.
- Requires the creation of a major new public park of 2.5 acres, easily accessible from the relocated Lechmere T station at extension of First Street.
- Requires general conformance with the Eastern Cambridge Plan and Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines as determined by the Planning Board in its review of the proposed PUD.





## PART II – PUD AT KENDALL SQUARE

### Purpose

Zoning recommendations for the PUD at Kendall Square, or as it is more commonly known, the Volpe Center area, reflect the desire for housing and open space to help enliven Kendall Square during all hours of the day. Proposed zoning changes would result in a mix of uses on the site. The zoning would apply to both the privately held property and the federally-owned land currently used by the Department of Transportation should it be redeveloped for non-governmental use in the future.

### Proposal

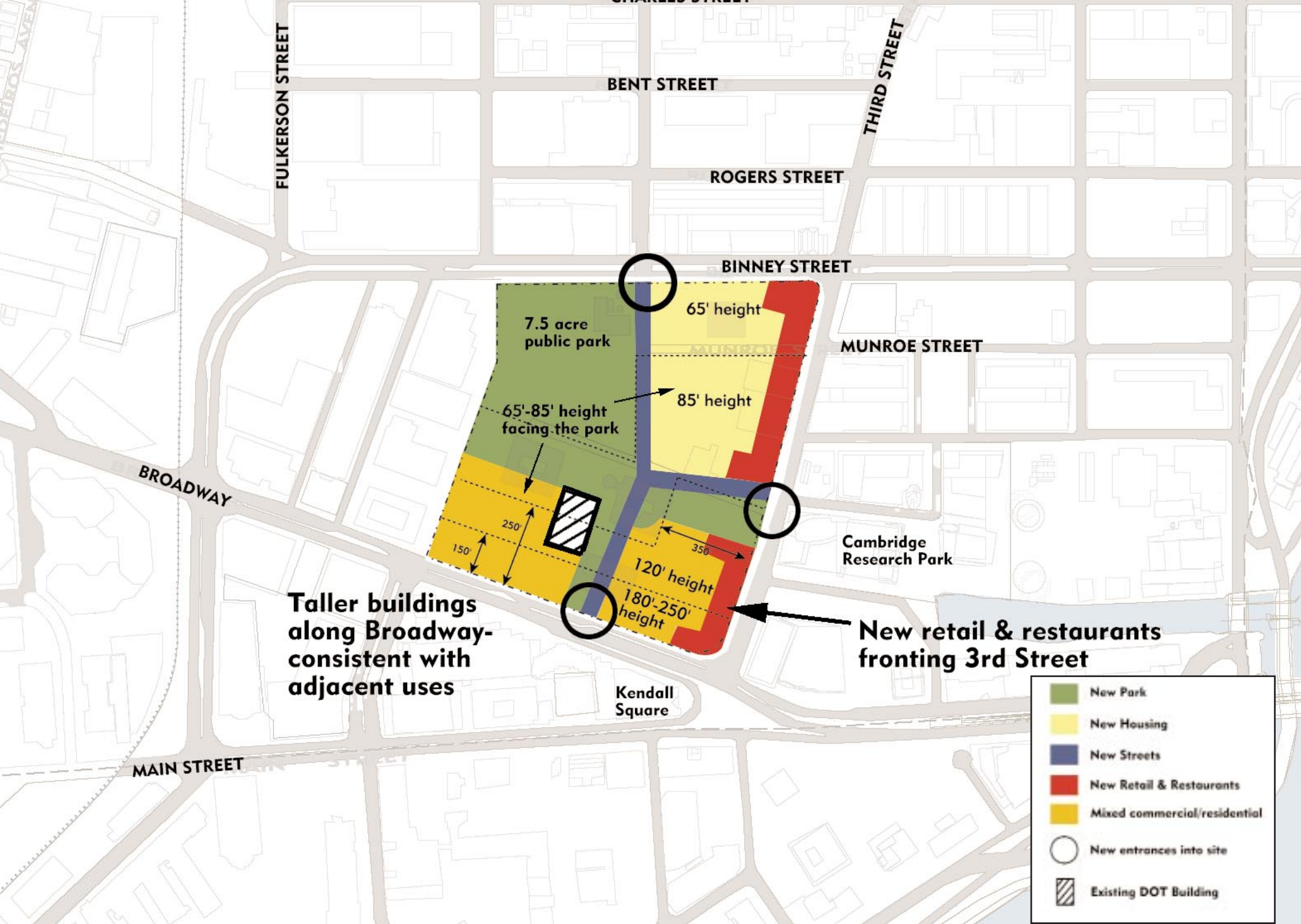
Proposed base zoning changes are intended to create a transition in land uses from Broadway to the residential neighborhoods north of Binney Street by requiring residential development to the north and mixed-use development to the south along Broadway, with a commercial district that encourages retail along Third Street. Changes proposed to the base zones are listed in the table below.

Existing District	Existing FAR	Proposed District	Proposed FAR	
			Commercial FAR	Residential FAR
Office 3A along Third Street	3.0	Business A	1.0	1.75
Office 3A north of Potter Street	3.0	Residence C-2B	1.75	1.75
Office 3A south of Potter Street	3.0	Office 2	1.5	2.0

Proposed PUD zoning for the Volpe Center area:

- Permits an FAR of 3.0
- Caps commercial development to restrict traffic growth and encourage the creation of a strong residential presence in the area. Total new commercial development would be limited to 60 percent of total development on the site (approximately 750,000 square feet).
- Requires lower heights closer to the neighborhoods (65 feet) transitioning to taller heights closer to commercial development on Broadway (180 feet). In the area along Broadway, buildings may go up to 250 feet, with a reduced floorplate (less than 10 percent of the parcel.)
- Adjacent to a public park, requires that parts of a building taller than 45 feet be set back an additional 20 feet from the façade.

- Requires a major new public open space along a portion of Binney Street. Overall, the amount of open space on the entire block at full development would be approximately 35 percent.
- Encourages retail on Third Street and Broadway to create active street life in Kendall Square. Up to 50,000 square feet of ground floor retail along Third Street, Broadway, and the public park would be exempt from the cap on commercial square footage.
- Limits new retail development to 75,000 square feet to avoid competing with existing retail centers. Restricts the size of retail floor areas to 10,000 square feet to avoid “big box” retail.
- Requires general conformance with the Eastern Cambridge Plan and Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines as determined by the Planning Board in its review of the proposed PUD.



## PART III - EASTERN CAMBRIDGE HOUSING OVERLAY DISTRICT (ECHO)

### **Purpose**

The intent of the Eastern Cambridge Housing Overlay District is to improve transitions between residential and commercial areas and to encourage the development of housing adjacent to existing residential neighborhoods.

### **Proposal**

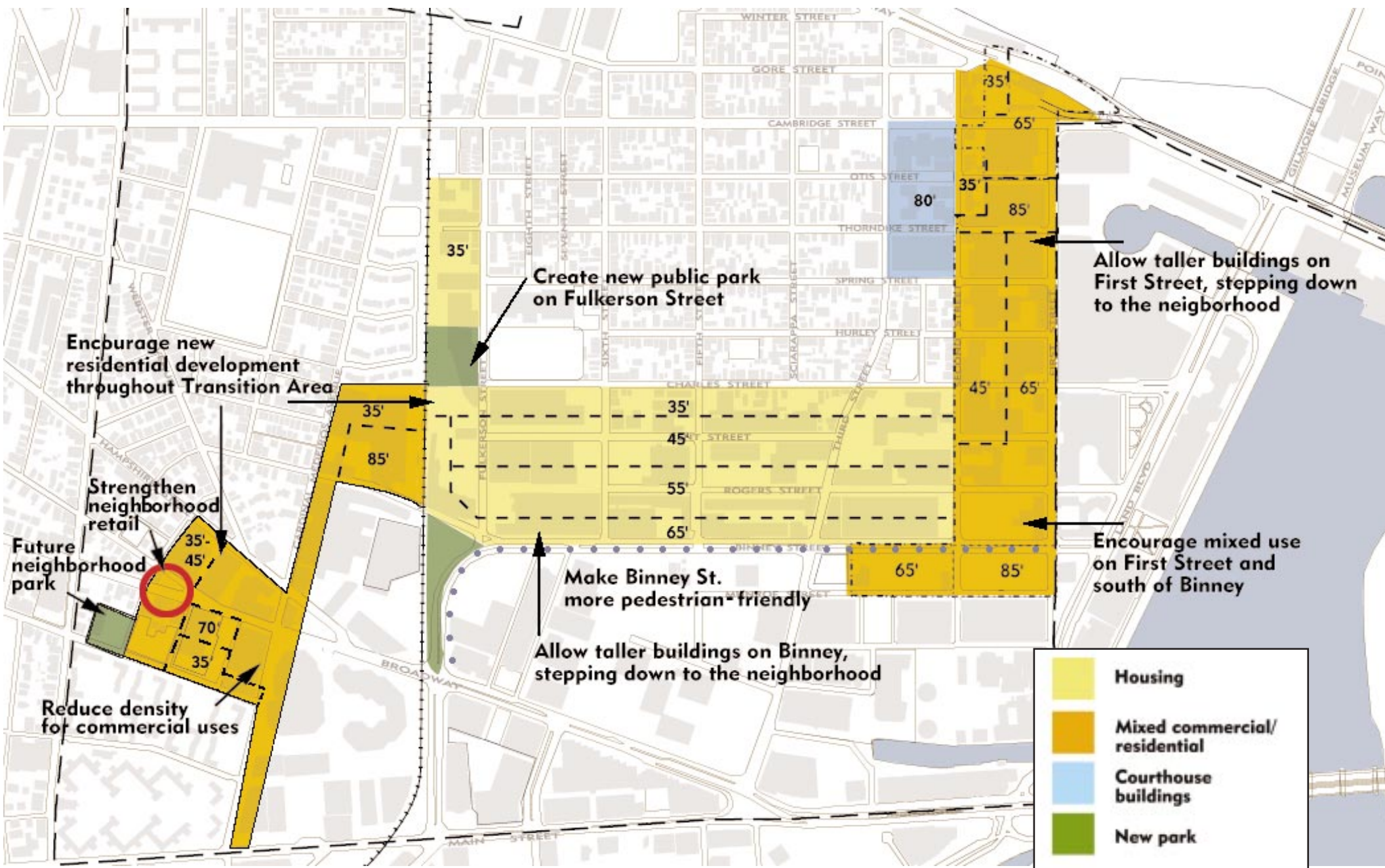
Base zoning changes are summarized in the table below.

Existing District	Existing FAR	Proposed District	Proposed FAR	
			Commercial FAR	Residential FAR
Industry B-1 between Binney St and Bent St.	3.0	Industry A-1	1.25	1.5
Industry B north of Binney St	4.0	Industry A-1	1.25	1.5

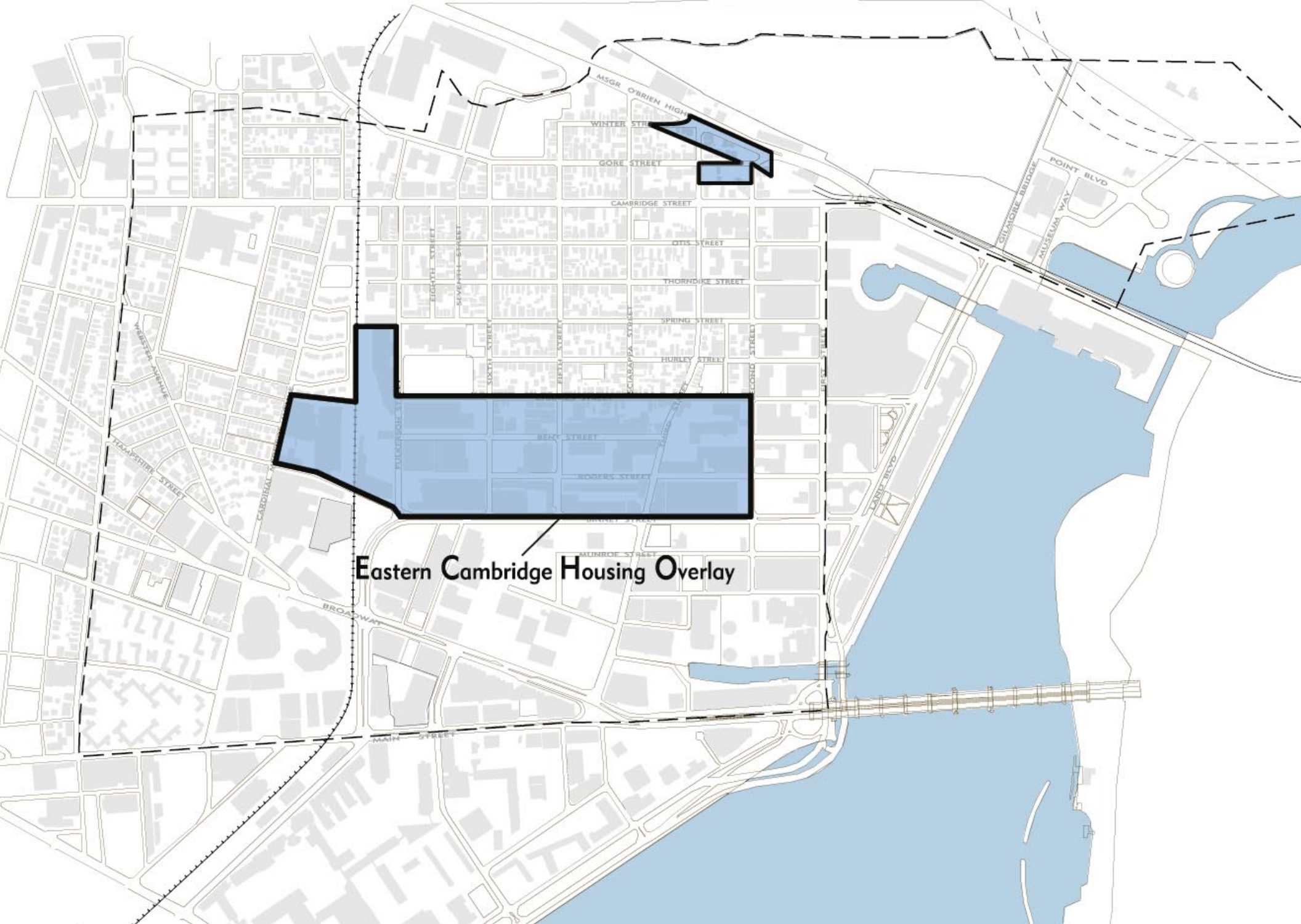
The Eastern Cambridge Housing Overlay District:

- Allows existing commercial uses to remain in the ECHO area as conforming uses.
- Creates a 2:1 differential between residential and commercial FARs in two areas:
  - The transition area bordered by Binney, Charles, Cardinal Medeiros, and Second Streets currently zoned or proposed to be rezoned Industry A-1, which has a commercial FAR of 1.25 under the Citywide Rezoning Petition. The residential FAR would be 2.5.
  - An area along O'Brien Highway currently zoned Business A, which has a commercial FAR of 1.0. The residential FAR would be 2.0.
- Applies new, finely graduated height limits in the Binney transition area that would establish a maximum height of 35 feet adjacent to the residential neighborhood along Charles Street, stepping up to maximum heights of 45 and 55 feet closer to Binney, and a maximum height of 65 feet along Binney.









Eastern Cambridge Housing Overlay

## PART IV - PUD 4, 4A AND 4B DISTRICTS

### **Purpose**

The intent of the PUDs between First and Second Streets is the development of an active, medium density, mixed-use area, while providing a strong incentive for housing through the Planned Unit Development (PUD). The PUDs encourage a mix of uses with a substantial component of housing located, where possible, adjacent to the existing residential neighborhood. Base zoning district changes are proposed, as well as the creation of two new PUDs.

### **Proposal**

Base district rezoning would involve changes summarized in the table below.

Existing District	Existing FAR	Proposed District	Proposed FAR	
			Commercial FAR	Residential FAR
Residence C1 (in PUD 4A area)	0.75	Residence C-2B	n.a.	1.75
Industry A-2 (in PUD 4A area)	4.0	Residence C-2A	n.a.	2.5
Industry A-2 (in PUD 4 area)	4.0	Business A	1.0	1.75
Industry A-2 (in PUD 4B area)	4.0	Business A	1.0	1.75
Industry B-1 (in PUD 4B area)	3.0	Industry A-1	1.25	1.5

### ***New PUD 4A:***

This includes the Duran Candy Factory site and the existing Lechmere station site. This district creates a high density residential base with low heights allowed as-of-right. The base zones are proposed to be Residence C-2A and Residence C-2B. Taller heights would be allowed under the PUD. The PUD:

- Permits an FAR of 2.5
- Limits non-residential uses to 50 percent of the GFA in the PUD.
- Encourages the reuse of existing historic industrial structures for mixed residential, retail and office uses
- Provides height limits for a transition from 45 feet adjacent to the residential neighborhood to 65 feet elsewhere.
- Requires that ground floor building spaces oriented toward public streets contain primarily retail or consumer service office uses to the extent possible.

***PUD 4:***

This small section of an existing PUD on the east of First Street covers the block containing the Davenport building. The base district here is proposed to be rezoned from an Industry A-2 to Business A, a low-density business district that allows a variety of office and retail uses. This is an extension of the PUD on the east of First Street. PUD 4 does the following:

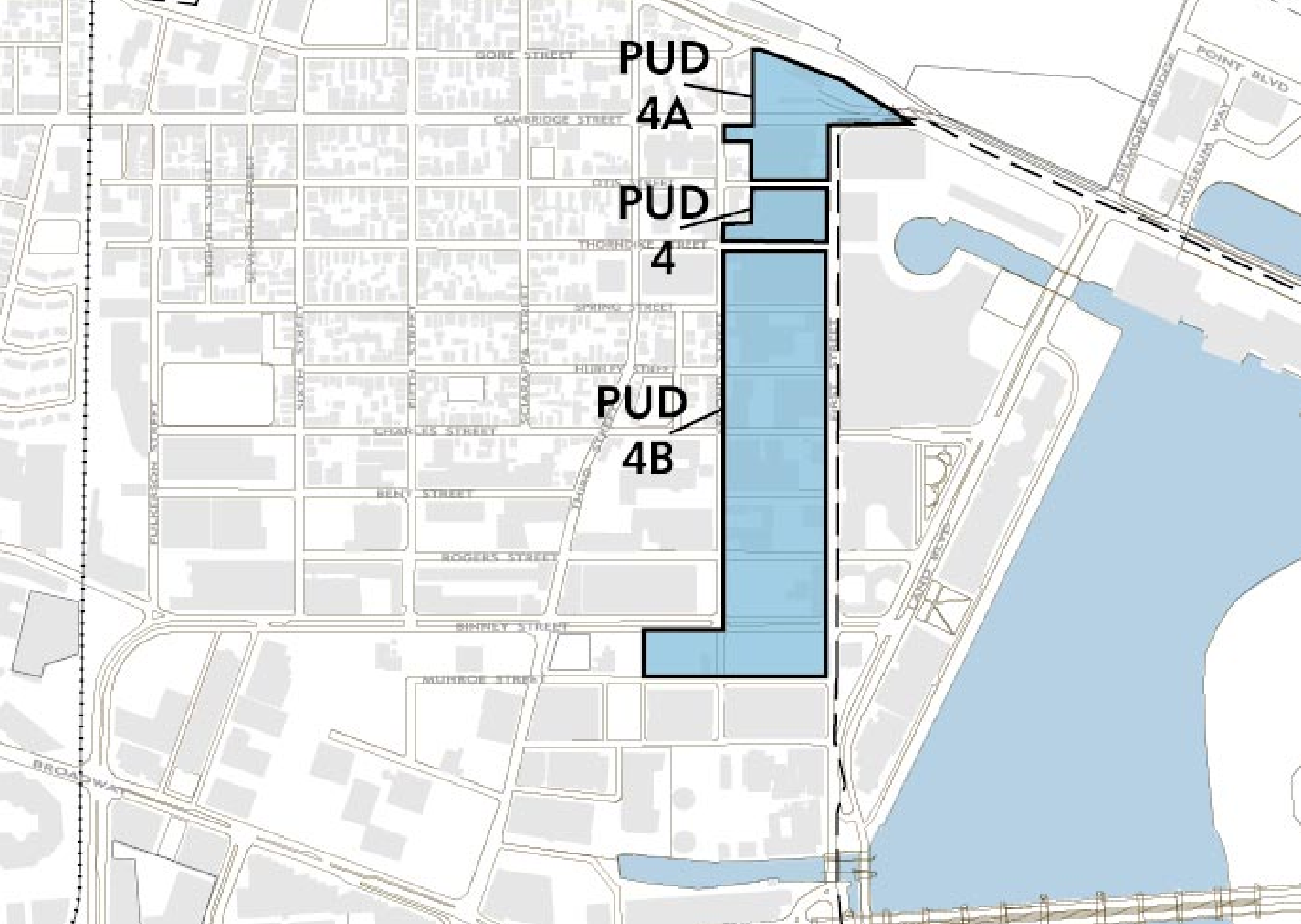
- Allows an FAR of 2.0
- Limits height in the PUD to 85 feet.
- Requires that ground floor building spaces oriented toward public streets must contain primarily retail or consumer service office uses to the extent possible.

***New PUD 4B:***

The base districts are proposed to be Industry A-1 and Business A. Specific provisions of the PUD-4B:

- Allow twice as much housing as commercial use (2.0 in areas with a Business A base, and 2.5 in areas with an Industry A-1 base), thereby providing an incentive for the development of housing and for the conversion of commercial structures to housing.
- Provide height limits varying from 45 feet on blocks abutting the residential neighborhoods to 85 feet farther away.
- Require that ground floor building spaces oriented toward public streets contain primarily retail or consumer service office uses to the extent possible.





## **PART V - EASTERN CAMBRIDGE DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS TRANSFER DISTRICTS**

### **Purpose**

The transfer of development rights provision is intended to encourage reduced commercial density close to existing residential neighborhoods, while moving commercial and mixed-use development to areas of Eastern Cambridge that are closer to transit and are more fully developed.

### **Proposal**

The transfer of development rights provision establishes two overlay districts: the Eastern Cambridge Transfer Donating District (TDD) and the Eastern Cambridge Transfer Receiving District (TRD). The TDD is the area north of Binney Street and adjacent to the residential neighborhoods from which development rights may be moved. The TRD is the largely commercial area between Binney Street and Main Street and is the district to which additional development may be transferred.

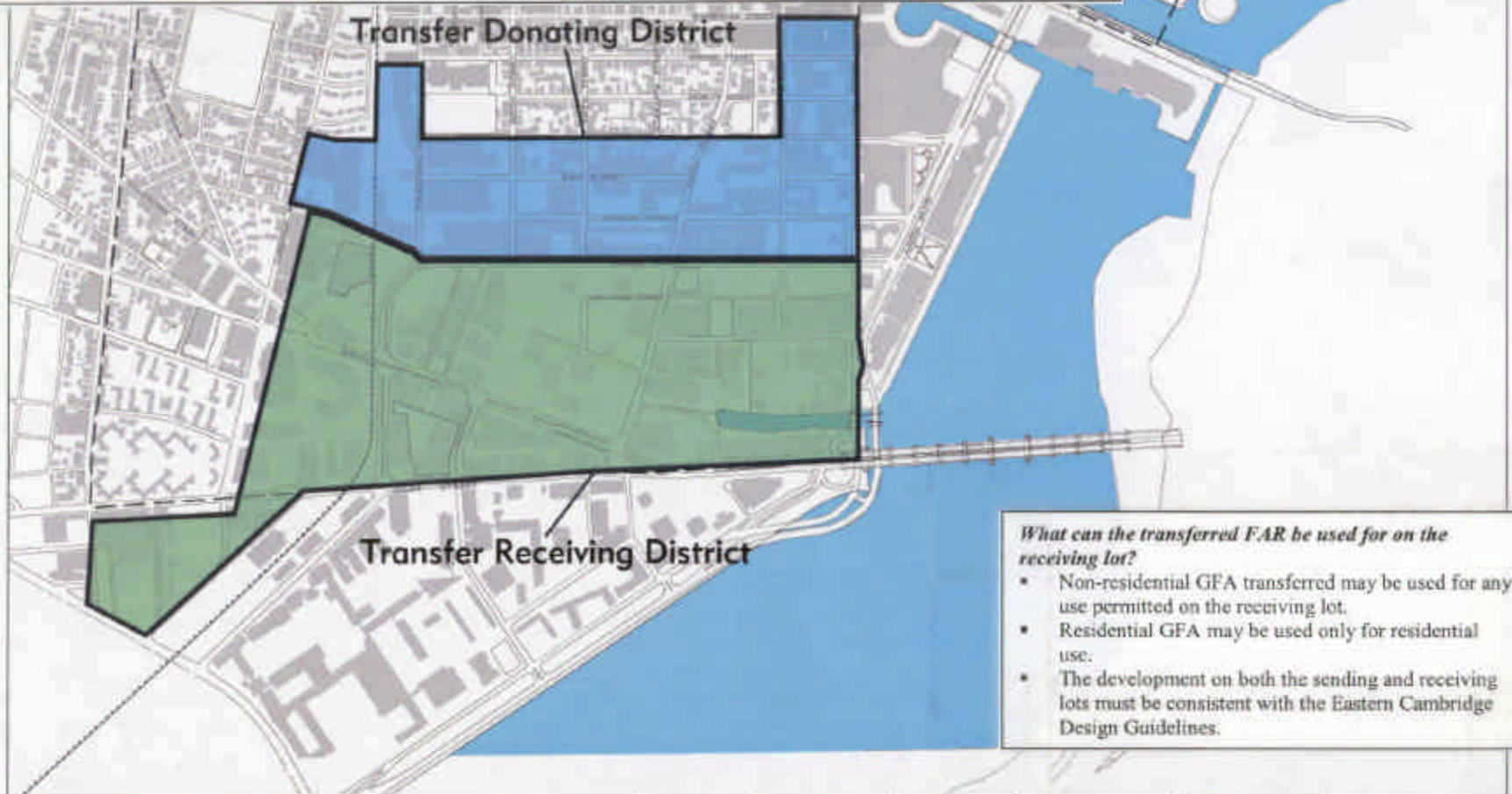
Donating districts allow transfer of existing or allowed non-residential development densities, plus allowed residential densities. After the transfer of development rights, the uses permitted on the donating lot would be residential or public park, with a nominal component (10 percent) of retail or office allowed. Transfers of development rights are to be allowed only by special permit from the Planning Board. This allows review of and public comment on the proposed use of the development rights on both the donating and the receiving site.

***How much density is available to transfer from a lot?***

- The existing amount of non-residential development built on the lot;
- or
- The total amount of non-residential development permitted;
- plus
- Residential development permitted on the lot minus 0.75 residential FAR to remain on the sending site.

***What can be done on the donating lot after development rights have been transferred out?***

- Residential development permitted after the transfer of non-residential GFA;
- or
- If there is a building on the site, the residential development that would be allowed under the provisions for Conversion of Non-Residential Structures ;
- or
- Housing at an FAR 0.75 in Res C-1 district or 1.25 in non-residential base districts;
- or
- A public park.



***What can the transferred FAR be used for on the receiving lot?***

- Non-residential GFA transferred may be used for any use permitted on the receiving lot.
- Residential GFA may be used only for residential use.
- The development on both the sending and receiving lots must be consistent with the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines.

## PART VI – ADDITIONAL ZONING CHANGES

### **Purpose**

The intent of these recommendations is to bring zoning into closer conformity with neighborhood and citywide goals in areas that fall outside North Point, the Volpe Center area, and the Eastern Cambridge Housing Overlay district. These include changes proposed in the Citywide Rezoning Petition, as well as additional recommendations, particularly in the transition area between the Area 4, Wellington-Harrington residential neighborhoods and commercial areas of Kendall Square.

### **Proposal**

The proposals in this section fall under four categories:

***Zoning district changes:*** Address rezoning of certain areas to encourage housing by rezoning to residential districts; create appropriate transitions adjacent to residential districts; more accurately reflect existing uses; and create open space.

Area	Existing District	Existing FAR	Proposed District	Proposed FAR	
				Commercial FAR	Residential FAR
Area A	Industry A	2.0	Business A	1.0	1.75
"	Business C	2.0	Business A	1.0	1.75
"	Residence C-1	0.75	Business A	1.0	1.75
Area B	Industry B	4.0	Office -1	0.75	0.75
Area C-1	Residence C-1	0.75	Open Space	0.25 (for permitted uses)	
Area C-2	Industry A-1	1.25	Open Space	0.25 (for permitted uses)	
"	Industry B-1	3.0	Open Space	0.25 (for permitted uses)	
"	Residence C-1	0.75	Open Space	0.25 (for permitted uses)	
Area E	Business A	1.0/1.75	Residence C-2B	n.a.	1.75
Area F	Business A-2	1.0/1.75	Residence C-2B	n.a.	1.75
Area 0	Industry A-1	4.0	Residence C-2B	n.a.	1.75

***Adjustments to amount of development allowed:*** These include changes in the amount of commercial development allowed on a lot and in some cases, reductions in height.

Area	Zoning District	Existing FAR	Proposed FAR	
			Commercial FAR	Residential FAR
Area D	MXD			Additional 200,000 sq. ft. of residential allowed
Area G	O-3A/PUD-3	3.0	2.0	3.0
Area H	Business B	3.0	2.75	3.0
Area I	Industry A-1	1.25	1.25	1.5
Area J	Industry B-1	3.0	1.5	3.0
Area K	Industry A	2.0	1.25	1.5
Area L	Industry B	4.0	2.75	4.0
Area M	Industry A-2	4.0	2.75	4.0
Area N	Special District 1	3.0	1.5	3.0

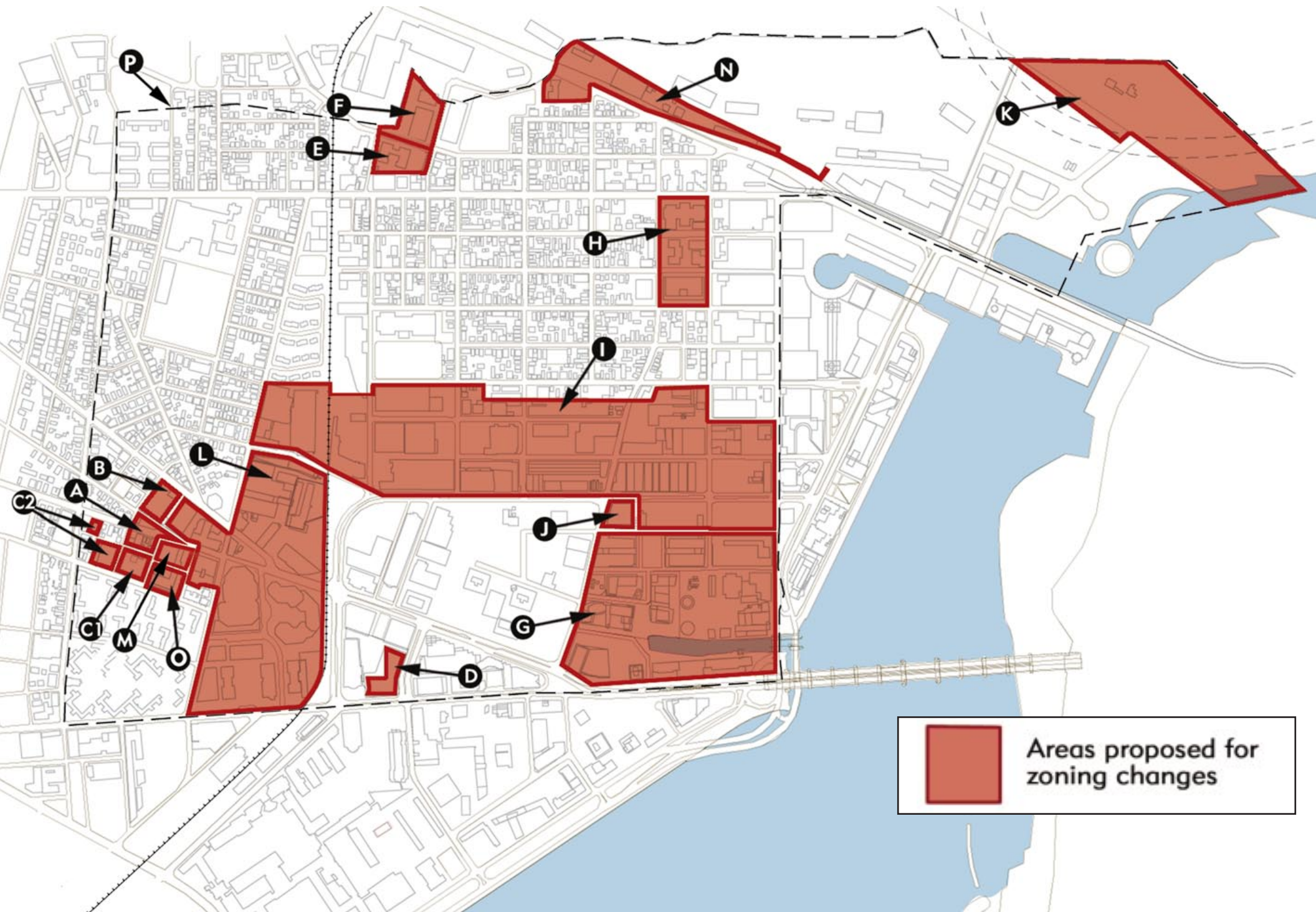
***Permit ground floor retail:*** Currently, ground floor retail is not permitted in the Industry B-1 district. In order to meet the goal of creating active ground floors and vibrant pedestrian environments, it is recommended that a change be made to permit ground floor retail in this district.

Area J. Retail uses in the Industry B-1 district

***Design guidelines:*** To allow the Planning Board to use the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines when issuing a project review special permit, it is proposed that the guidelines be referenced in the Citywide Urban Design Objectives for project review.

Area P. The entire Eastern Cambridge Planning Study area





## **PART VII - EASTERN CAMBRIDGE DESIGN GUIDELINES**

The Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines, which were developed as part of the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study, are intended to inform property owners, business owners, developers, and the general public about the desired form and character of development in the ECaPS Study Area (see attached map, Eastern Cambridge Focus Areas). They will guide development activities in this area, particularly in North Point, the Volpe site, the transition areas between residential neighborhoods and Kendall Square, as well as other areas in Wellington-Harrington, Area IV, and East Cambridge. The aim is to create consistently high-quality public environments, and to ensure that development contributes to the character and vitality of the surrounding community. The guidelines are based on the following core principles:

- Manage development to maintain livability in residential neighborhoods and ensure compatibility with existing neighborhood character.
- Provide better transitions between developed/developing areas and residential neighborhoods.
- Create new mixed-use neighborhoods at North Point and the Volpe Center that are integrated with the existing urban fabric.
- Enhance quality of life through the creation of active streets, new public open spaces, and expanded retail opportunities.
- Strengthen pedestrian and bicycle connections throughout Eastern Cambridge, especially between residential neighborhoods and Kendall Square, the Lechmere transit station, and the Charles River.

The Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines will be referenced by the Planning Board in their review of special permit applications for projects in the ECaPS Study Area that are before the Board. These guidelines will be specifically referenced in the City's zoning ordinance in the Project Review Special Permit section and in the PUD text where applicable.

The guidelines are organized into two sections: Built Form, which addresses the use, scale, and character of buildings; and Public Realm, which addresses connections, streets and sidewalks, open space, and transportation. Where additional area-specific guidelines are proposed, they are listed at the end of the appropriate section. The areas are the focus areas as defined for ECaPS and are shown in the attached map, Eastern Cambridge Focus Areas.